

Environmental Fact Sheet

EPA Releases Report To House Appropriations Committee On The Leaking Underground Storage Tank Program

Background

Subtitle I of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act requires the development and implementation of a comprehensive regulatory program for underground storage tank (UST) systems. EPA published final technical and state program approval regulations for USTs containing regulated substances on September 23, 1988, and financial responsibility regulations on October 26, 1988. EPA's Office of Underground Storage Tanks (OUST) manages the program to implement these regulations.

In August 1992, the House Appropriations Committee asked EPA to provide a report on "the extent of the underground storage tanks problem, the status of EPA's efforts, and the costs involved in remedying this problem." The Agency prepared a report to respond directly to the Committee's request and submitted it to the House Appropriations Committee on March 9, 1993. The report provides an overview of the regulatory program as of the end of fiscal year 1992 and includes key aspects of implementation, cleanup costs and EPA's efforts to control them, and program needs and EPA's plans to meet them.

Highlights Of The Report

- As of 1992, about 1.6 million petroleum underground storage tanks and 37,000 hazardous substance tanks are subject to the federal regulations. EPA estimates that about 20 percent of the regulated 1.6 million petroleum USTs are leaking.
- When petroleum or hazardous substance tanks leak, the products they release can contaminate surface and groundwater, cause fire and explosions, and expose people to substances (e.g., benzene, a carcinogen) that cause adverse health effects.
- Confirmed releases are being reported at a rate of about 1,000 per week; state workers are overseeing up to 400 cases at a time. EPA estimates that the number of releases will level off at about 320,000 releases during fiscal year 1995 and then will increase at a slower rate.

- With current resources available for state oversight of the responsible party cleanups and for state-lead sites, states and responsible parties are initiating cleanups at about 36,000 sites per year and completing cleanups at about 16,000 sites per year. EPA's LUST Trust Fund was created to assist states in the cleanup of leaking USTs. Of the \$900 million collected in the fund, \$400 million has been appropriated.
- State or local agency cleanup program staff oversee increasing caseloads of active cleanups, usually conducted by responsible parties. Responsible parties conduct approximately 97 percent of all leaking UST cleanups.
- Costs of remediating or cleaning up releases can vary greatly and be influenced by several factors, including the volume of the release, the extent of contamination, geologic characteristics, level of cleanup required, and state reporting requirements.
- Costs of remediating leaking USTs can generally be grouped into two cost classes: Sites with soil contamination and sites with groundwater contamination. The costs for remediating sites with soil contamination generally vary between \$10,000 and \$125,000. Costs for remediating sites with groundwater contamination can range from \$100,000 to over \$1 million, depending upon the extent of contamination.

Conclusions

The increasing backlog of cleanups, the high costs of cleanups, limited state and federal funds, and concern about small owners and operators having the funds to pay for cleanups make it essential to identify opportunities for reducing costs and streamlining corrective action processes. One of OUST's top priorities is assisting states in streamlining their corrective action programs and promoting innovative site investigations and cleanup technologies.

It is also essential for the UST program to focus on activities to prevent future releases and to detect ongoing releases as early as possible. Consequently, enforcement of the technical requirements of the prevention program and the approval of state programs will continue to be priorities for the UST program.

Contact

For additional information on the federal UST requirements or to obtain a copy of the report, contact EPA's RCRA Hotline, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. EST. The national toll-free number is 800 424-9346; for the hearing impaired, the number is TDD 800 553-7672. In Washington, DC, the number is 703 920-9810.